

ROMAN COLOSSEUM

SPECTACULAR
VISUAL GUIDES



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THE RULING CLASS

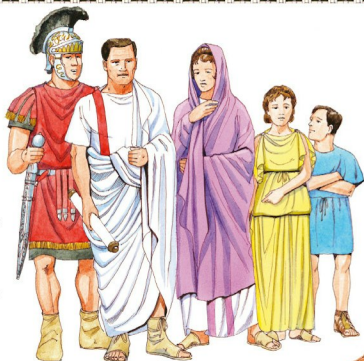
FOR NEARLY FIVE centuries (509 to 27 BC), Rome was a republic. Elected officials ruled on behalf of the Roman people. In 27 BC, after years of civil war, the old republic was swept away and emperors began to rule. Officially the emperor's title was *princeps* (first citizen) but, by the time the Colosseum was being built, Emperor Domitian (ruled AD 81–96) was demanding to be hailed as 'Master and God'.

Like other emperors, Domitian claimed to be more than just a man. Past emperors were worshipped in temples built in their honour after they were dead. Domitian's proud title reveals the emperors' tremendous powers. Massive building projects, like the Colosseum, reveal their vast wealth.

Emperors were expected to rule with the advice of the Senate: an assembly of nobles who had all held senior government posts. The Senate could discuss government policies and pass resolutions (called *senatus consulta*) which had the force of law.

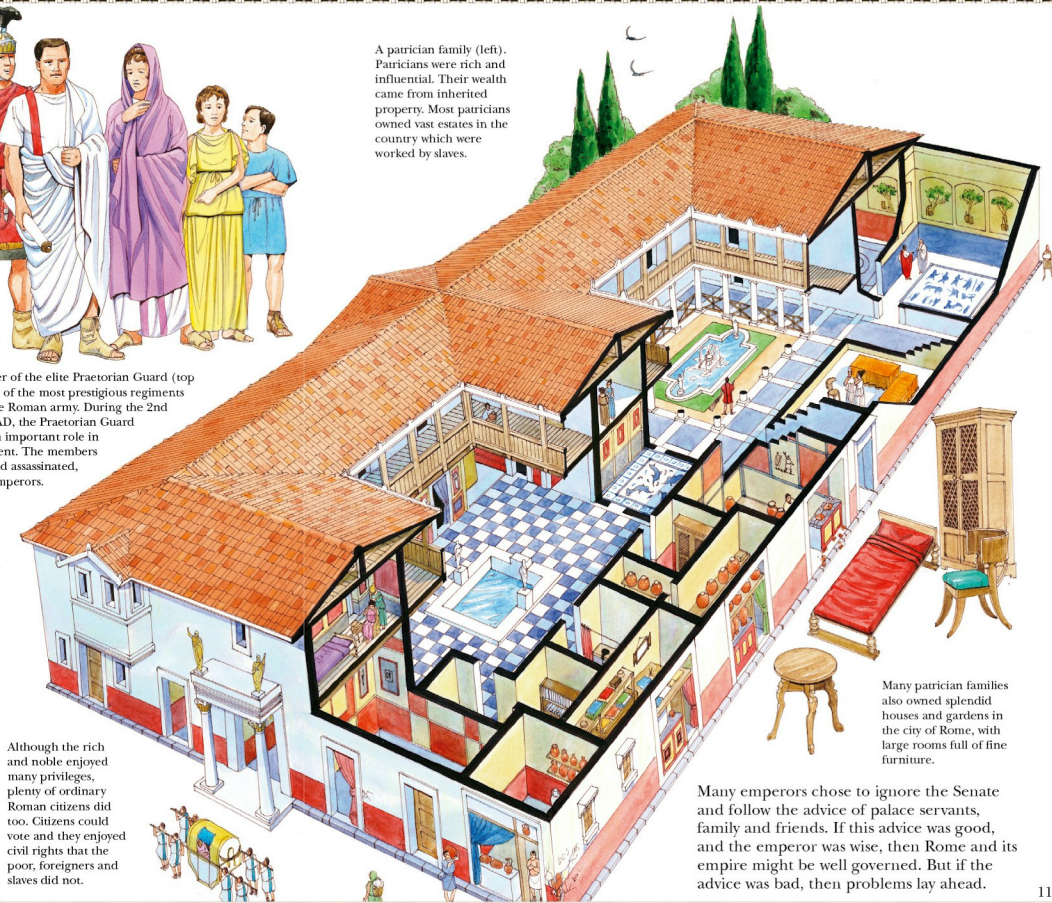


A patrician (nobleman) making a speech in the Senate (assembly). Under the Republican system, the Senate was the chief governing body of Rome. Its members discussed (and often shaped) government policy and proposed new laws. Senators all came from patrician (noble) families; they had all held senior government posts. After the republic ended in 27 BC, the number of senators was reduced, but the Senate still debated the emperor's actions and offered advice.



A member of the elite Praetorian Guard (top left), one of the most prestigious regiments within the Roman army. During the 2nd century AD, the Praetorian Guard played an important role in government. The members chose, and assassinated, several emperors.

A patrician family (left). Patricians were rich and influential. Their wealth came from inherited property. Most patricians owned vast estates in the country which were worked by slaves.



Although the rich and noble enjoyed many privileges, plenty of ordinary Roman citizens did too. Citizens could vote and they enjoyed civil rights that the poor, foreigners and slaves did not.

Many patrician families also owned splendid houses and gardens in the city of Rome, with large rooms full of fine furniture.

Many emperors chose to ignore the Senate and follow the advice of palace servants, family and friends. If this advice was good, and the emperor was wise, then Rome and its empire might be well governed. But if the advice was bad, then problems lay ahead.

ORDINARY CITIZENS

WE DO NOT KNOW the exact population of Rome during the time the Colosseum was being built (AD 72–96), but historians estimate that it was around one million in AD 100.

A few Roman families were nobles, as rich and sophisticated as the city itself. Many more were ordinary, hard-working tradesmen and women, busy in occupations ranging from pastry-makers and perfumers to corn-merchants, silk-weavers and cooks. Other poorer citizens survived on part-time work and state charity. But they were all proud to belong to the city of Rome.

Many of Rome's inhabitants were not 'proper' citizens. Roman law allowed peoples from all over the empire to come to Rome, though they did not have full citizen's rights. There was also an enormous population of male and female slaves – around 400,000 in AD 100.

Foreigners and (especially) slaves were governed by harsh laws. For example, a master or mistress could put their slave to death. But, increasingly, these laws came to matter less and differences in work and wealth between citizens came to matter more. Many foreigners and slaves found good jobs and prospered, while Roman-born citizens remained poor.

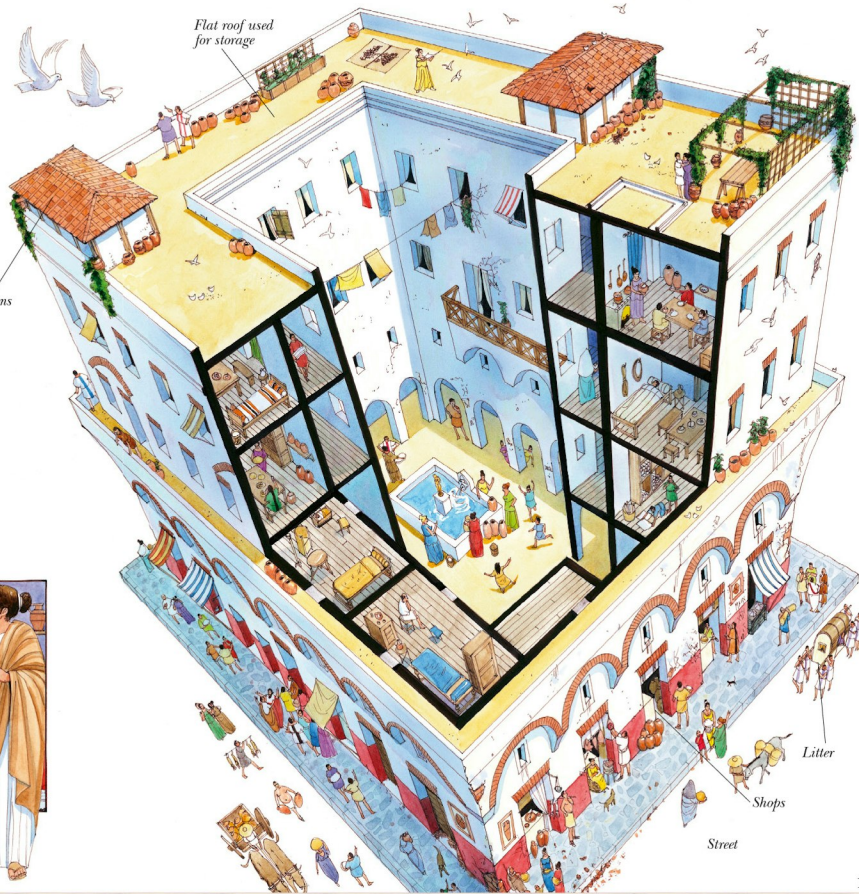
A busy Roman street in a district where ordinary people lived. In the summer people liked to spend time out of doors, away from their small, cramped homes. Many streets were lined with shops and stalls. There were taverns selling hot food and wine, and public lavatories and water fountains on many street corners.



Right: A big block of flats, called an *insula* (island), built in the 1st century AD to provide homes for the rapidly increasing population of Rome. City land was becoming expensive, so Roman engineers designed buildings several storeys high to make maximum use of space. Water came from the public fountain and there might be a toilet in the courtyard.

Extra rooms on roof

Blocks of flats had shops and offices at street level and cramped, draughty attic rooms under the roof. The biggest and best rooms were on the first floor.



LAYOUT AND MATERIALS

THE LAYOUT of the Colosseum was simple: a high outer wall lined inside with sloping tiers of seats, with terraces and walkways in between. Below the rows of seats was a promenade, where spectators might walk and talk with their friends during the lunchtime interval between shows.

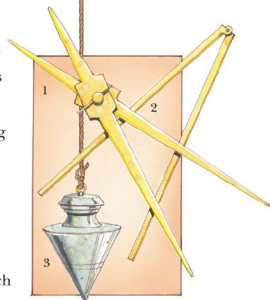
The architects and engineers who planned the Colosseum's layout also had to choose the most suitable building materials. It would have been impractical to make the entire building out of solid stone because it would soon have collapsed under its own weight. So they used tiers of strong, but much lighter, stone arches for the outer walls. The rest of the building was constructed around a framework of tall stone columns that were filled in with cheaper, lighter materials.

Limestone blocks were used for this framework and to face the walls. They were carefully trimmed to shape, then fastened together with metal clamps. Several different types of material were used for 'filling in'. Tufa (a tough volcanic stone) was used for the lower walls, and concrete (a Roman invention) and brick were used for the upper walls. The ceiling-vaults were made of pumice, a soft volcanic stone.



Keystone

Arches were built over a wooden framework called centring. It held the stone pillars at either side of the arch in place and stopped the wedge-shaped stones falling out while the arch was being built. Once the keystone, the stone in the centre of the arch, was in place, all the stones locked together and the centring could be removed.

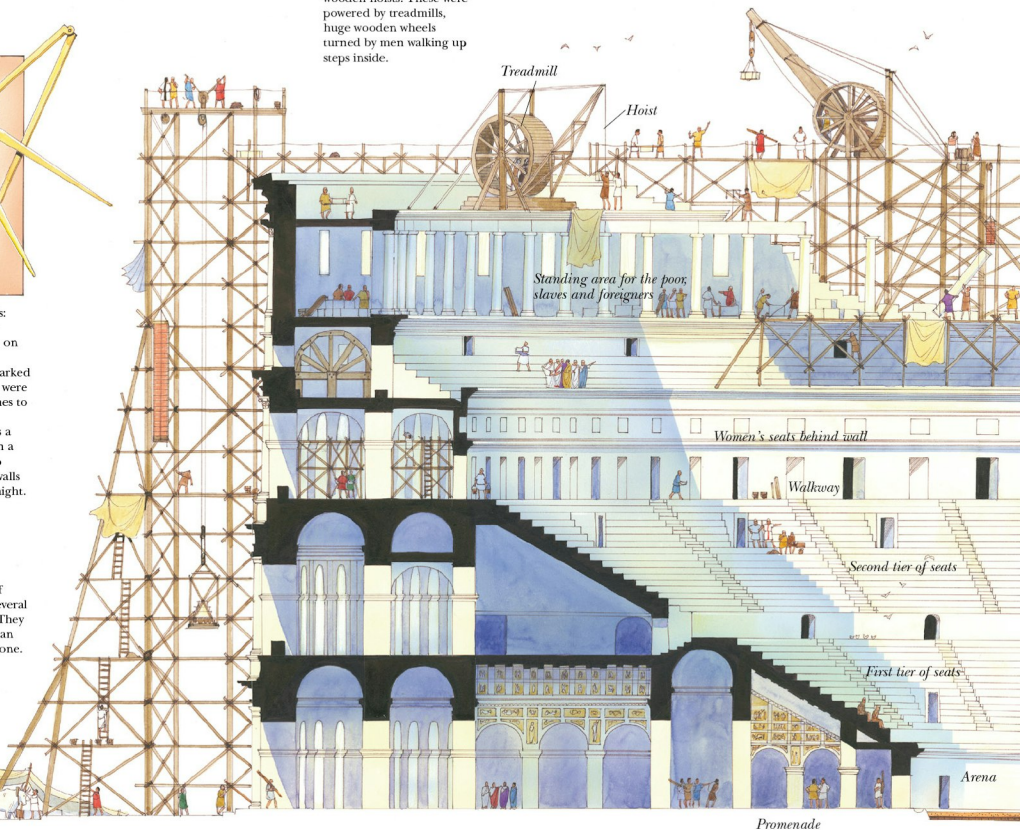


Roman surveyors' tools:

1. Bronze dividers, for measuring distances on architects' plans.
2. Folding foot-rule, marked off in inches. There were about 4 Roman inches to 10 centimetres.
3. Plumb-bob. This was a heavy lead weight on a string. It was used to check whether the walls were being built straight.

Walls made of tiers of arches can be built several storeys high (right). They are much stronger than walls made of solid stone.

Stone was raised with large wooden hoists. These were powered by treadmills, huge wooden wheels turned by men walking up steps inside.



Treadmill

Hoist

Standing area for the poor, slaves and foreigners

Women's seats behind wall

Walkway

Second tier of seats

First tier of seats

Arena

Promenade

SEATS AND TICKETS

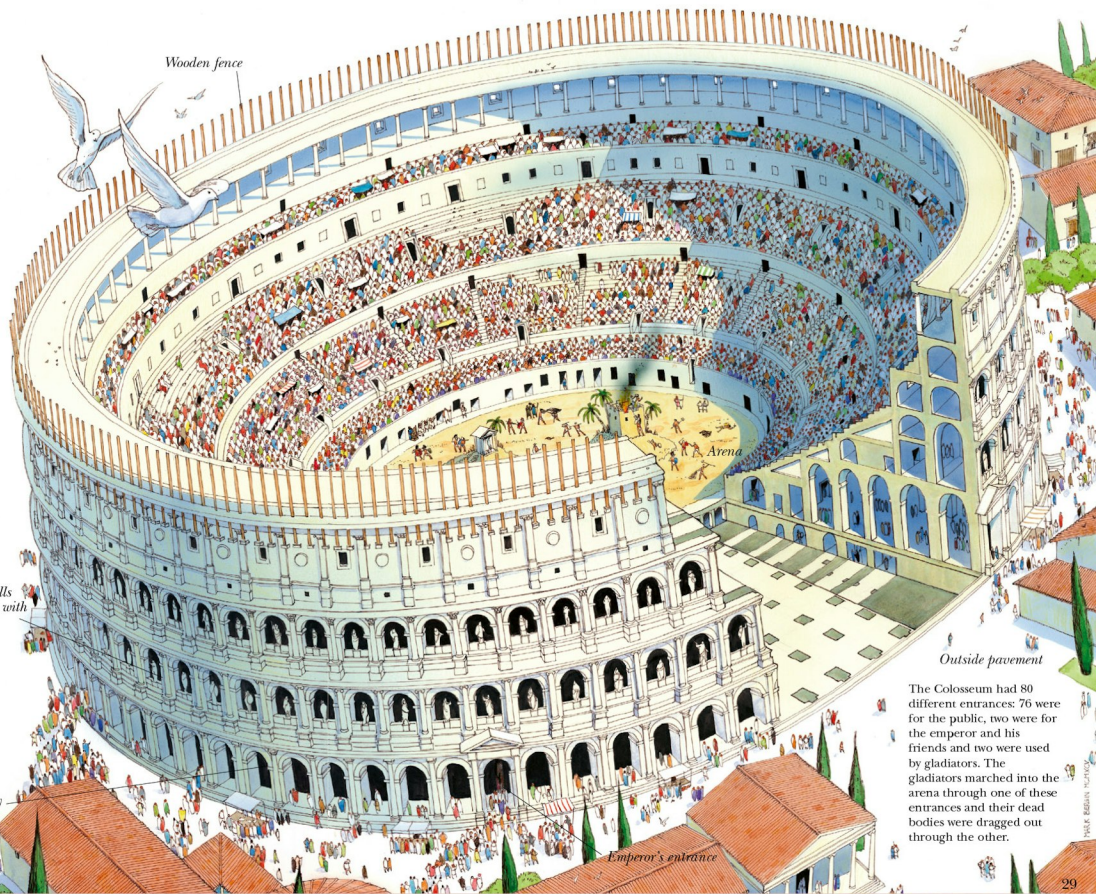
ENTRANCE TO THE COLOSSEUM was free. But that did not mean everyone could get in to watch the public executions, gladiator fights or wild-beast shows. Men from noble families, influential politicians and the emperor's friends were all allowed to sit in specially reserved seats. Among the rest of the population, only the people who had been given tokens were allowed to enter and make their way along the well-planned walkways and corridors to their individually numbered seats.

There were different kinds of seats for the different classes of spectator. The emperor and his friends sat in a splendid marble enclosure behind the arena. There were private enclosures too, for the Vestal Virgins (temple priestesses), for male priests and for senior senators. The remaining seats were divided into three tiers: the first twenty rows were for wealthy citizens and the next sixteen rows were for men of middle rank. The third tier was for women only. Their seats were sheltered behind a high wall, so they could watch in privacy, away from the rude and noisy crowds.

Poor people, foreigners and slaves, who were rarely given tokens, stood high up on a wooden terrace at the back of the seats.

The Colosseum had seats for 45,000 people, plus room for 5,000 standing. Only citizens with entrance tokens (called *lesserae*) could get seats. Tokens and seats were numbered. This made it easier for spectators to find their places. Tokens were distributed by slaves belonging to the rulers, government officials and rich noblemen who

sponsored the games, hoping to win popularity and keep the city calm. Spectators let off steam by getting wildly excited at the Colosseum and were therefore much less likely to riot. Emperors planned their appearances at the Colosseum very carefully. They hoped to encourage displays of loyalty from the crowds.



The Colosseum had 80 different entrances: 76 were for the public, two were for the emperor and his friends and two were used by gladiators. The gladiators marched into the arena through one of these entrances and their dead bodies were dragged out through the other.